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Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/31511252.

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Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter
Additional Tags:	Light Angst, Fluff, Angst and Fluff and Smut, Established Relationship, Will Graham Loves Hannibal Lecter, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter in Love, Smoking, Hannibal Lecter Has Feelings, Mongoose as a metaphor for love, light roleplay, about hypothermia and unethical medical conduct, Anal Fingering, Anal Sex
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of The Beau Effect
Collections:	How Many Is Too Many?
Stats:	Published: 2021-05-25 Words: 4,602 Chapters: 1/1

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by barcharonte

Summary

An e-mail from Baltimore reminds Will of everything he now has that he cannot bear to lose. Hannibal makes sure to remind him that losing has never been an option for them. They also find a way to protect each other from the cold winter nights of Paris, and it involves less clothing than either could have predicted.

Hannibal noticed the change in Will immediately.

It began after dinner. Abigail, although she was in love with her new place, still came to have dinner with them almost every night, and sometimes found an excuse to stay afterwards for a couple more hours. Tonight, it was her need for more French speaking exercise that kept her there. She was in her prep year and had to prove her proficiency in French before she could begin to take the courses in her own department, which meant that she was attending language lessons in the college five days a week. Her education was more reminiscent of high school than college at the moment, but Hannibal appreciated her dedication to learning French, and was more than happy to converse with her, subtly correcting her pronunciation and grammar.

Will had been weaving in and out of the conversation about the recent art gallery to which Hannibal and Abigail had dragged him. His accent was more than passable and improving still, and his grasp on the grammar and pronunciation was better than Abigail's, but he had trouble matching the right contexts with the right words. Hannibal took great pleasure teaching him, and as a result Will had become quite efficient in communicating in great detail exactly what he wanted in bed- Grocery shopping, on the other hand, was still a vexing experience.

But at some point, Hannibal noticed that himself and Abigail had been alone in voicing their dislike for a particular art piece, and its snobbish artist. Hannibal looked at Will, and saw him scowling down at his phone.

"Will?" Will looked up at him from where he was sitting with his legs under him and with a blanket on his lap. He looked cosy, and it was a fine evening they were having together, but his frown remained. "Is there something wrong?"

A pleasant expression replaced the frown, but Hannibal could tell it was a deliberate act instead of a natural occurrence. "No, nothing," Will said. He made several attempts to converse with them after that, but Hannibal still saw him glance at his phone with heavy eyes. It was clear, however, that he did not want to talk about it at the moment. Hannibal knew to let it go for now and to wait for Will to come to him when he was ready. They were secure in their relationship, the solid foundations of honesty and communication upon which they agreed making trust an easy thing, and that still sometimes befuddled Hannibal.

The reliability of their relationship, the confidence with which they regarded each other and their lives together, the unassuming ways they carried the responsibility to look after one another's wellbeing and happiness, the sanctuary provided solely by the determination to stay unwaveringly devoted to this small, patchwork of a family, the stability, the sense of belonging, the possessiveness and the vicious urge to protect… Hannibal had asked for one teacup to gather itself back together, and was instead given a full set, each more precious for having been broken, the cracks a bright gold under the star shine.

And he owed it all to Will, who defied his machinations and refused to be anything less than his equal. Whatever happiness Hannibal felt daily in the sanctity of quiet moments where he looked around himself and saw family, was thanks to Will's sacrifice of his home, his trusted

canine companions, his jobs, and the life he had made for himself. Hannibal was going to respect him for it and cherish him until he breathed his last breath.

After Abigail left, they finished their drinks- whiskey for Will, and red wine for Hannibal- and retired to bed. Will made no mention of whatever had ailed him earlier, and Hannibal did not press on and demand answers. They fell asleep in a tangle of limbs, and Hannibal was appeased; it was a usual end to their days in Paris.

Until Hannibal threw an arm to Will's side of the bed and found it empty.

No light came from the en-suite bathroom, and no sound from the rest of the house. Hannibal, instantly awake and sober, calmly got up, and went to look for Will. His quick search of the study, the living room, the kitchen and the bathroom downstairs yielded no results, and a quick glance confirmed the yards in the front and back empty. He went back upstairs, and did a quick perusal of the bedrooms; Abigail's, theirs again, guests', the second bathroom… Nothing. The shiver that ran down Hannibal's spine at that point had nothing to do with getting up from bed and into the cold winter night, and everything to do with the irrational thought that he couldn't ignore anymore.

Will is gone. He's gone. He left and he's not going to come back. Will is gone. He's go-

And that was when Hannibal noticed a tiny red light at the end of the hallway. It was as if it came into existence in a blink, grew brighter and brighter until it became dim again. Relief filled Hannibal like a liquid filling an empty vessel. He took a steadying breath before getting two blankets from the closest bedroom- guests'- and going to join Will at the terrace.

At the sound of the door opening, Will turned to look at him. It was dark with only the light coming from the streetlamps in the distance, but seeing the Will-shaped shadow sitting on the bench, his breath visible in the cold December night, was assurance enough.

"I looked all over the house for you," Hannibal said as he approached. Will shifted to make space for him, and he sat only after he draped one of the blankets on Will's lap. The other, he wrapped around both their backs.

Once it was made sure that he would be as warm as he could possibly be, Will said, "I didn't hear you," referring to Hannibal's catlike gait.

"I can say the same for you," Hannibal said. "I fear that I'm rubbing off on you."

Will lifted the cigarette to his lips, and took a deep drag. The red embers burned bright, and dimmed again when he exhaled. "Nightmare," he said at length.

"Ah." Will's nightmares began mildly and increased in terror slowly. He became more and more agitated as his mind attacked itself, and Hannibal usually woke at the first fidgeting limb or jerky breath. He had learned shortly after they started sharing a bed that providing Will with tactile distractions was the most effective way of ending the nightmare without waking him up from his rest. Most of the time, even Will did not know he had been on the verge of a nightmare, and on the rare occasions Hannibal slept through the initial stages, Will was quick to let himself be eased back to sleep in Hannibal's arms.

Hannibal regarded tonight as a personal failure.

“Did it have anything to do with whatever upset you earlier?” He asked.

“Nothing escapes you, does it?” Will sighed, but he was promptly revitalized when Hannibal reached for the cigarette in his hand and drew in a breath himself. “You- What-?”

Hannibal smiled. He savoured the smoke in his lungs, held it in for a few beats before releasing it, the fumes spreading white into the night one moment and dissipating the next.

“I was not sheltered in my youth, Will,” he said, “I’ve had my fair share of experimentation with many substances. And while all of them are bad for the health, tobacco is among the more innocent ones.”

Will took his phone from where he left it on his other side, and turned on its flashlight. It was suddenly very bright, but Hannibal controlled himself so as not to flinch. Instead, he smiled at Will’s surprised face and curious eyes, and took another drag.

“I had to see it,” Will mumbled. Wanting to lighten his sombre mood further, Hannibal licked his lips and released the smoke from his nose. “You look so hot right now you have no idea,” Will said, enthralled. Hannibal blinked slowly and passed the cigarette back to him.

“In that case, we should do this again when the lighting is more flattering,” Hannibal said, nodding towards the phone. Will shook his head dragged the nearest coffee table close with his feet. He put the phone facing upwards as a makeshift lantern, placing his pack, the lighter and the ashtray next to it.

“For easy access,” he explained, “in case you wanted to, I don’t know, light up another or something.”

“That’s very thoughtful of you,” Hannibal said, amused, and shifted closer to him until their thighs touched from hip to knee. “It really is an unfortunate night to venture outside, Will. You must have really wanted your solitude.”

“Not solitude,” Will said, his thumb caressing the butt of the cigarette absentmindedly. “I wanted to avoid the lecture you’d give me if I smoked inside.”

Ignoring the teasing, Hannibal asked, “That bad, huh?” He knew Will did not take refuge in tobacco unless he was feeling out of sorts. “What was it, Will? What upset you so?”

“It’s Chilton,” Will said, but then corrected. “Well, Chilton’s lawyer, really. He sent me an e-mail. Says Chilton wants to talk to me."

Hannibal considered this. "What about?"

"'*His wrongful imprisonment*,'" Will replied. "Apparently he's been denying the convictions. Which, of course he does. But…"

"But you fear he might garner some unwanted attention," Hannibal finished the thought.

"If he's feeling so desperate as to contact *me*, he must already have talked to Jack. Maybe they've been talking all along. What if-"

"Frederick has been tried and found guilty on irrefutable evidence, Will," Hannibal interrupted. "I made sure of it."

"Yes, but it doesn't make much sense, does it? The Ripper is not a killer to deny accusations in prison. According to his profile, the profile *I* made, he's arrogant and egocent...ric." Will paused his rant to look at Hannibal from under his lashes, sheepish, "I mean, you *are*," he said more quietly.

"None of what you said was incorrect, my love. You are speaking facts. It would be tragic if I was so unaware of myself as to take offense." He watched as Will put out the cigarette, repeatedly hitting the stub on the ashtray with agitation. "I can imagine being very proud of my accomplishments in case I am ever incarcerated."

"Don't say that," Will said sharply. "You are not to, *ever*, get caught. You hear me, Doctor Lecter?" His eyes, when he turned to stare Hannibal down, had a manic gleam to them. "I would break you out and kill you myself if you ever do."

Hannibal was touched. The implication that if Hannibal was ever seized it would be because he let himself be seized was such a show of trust in Hannibal's abilities that it made him want to preen under the gaze. It was also very assuring to hear that Will would end him for daring to disrupt this beautiful thing that they had. Being regarded with such possessiveness was absolutely giddying, but Hannibal did not think now was the time to give voice to such thoughts.

"I would make sure we are all dead, my darling Will, before I let us become apprehended," he assured, knowing that absolute, unabashed honesty was the only way to placate Will. And it worked. Will reached for another cigarette before using his free hand to tighten the blanket around himself.

"I'd appreciate that," he said. "I'd take death over prison any day."

For Hannibal, that uttered sentiment might as well have been a blow to the head. Unable to bear looking at Will, he looked over at the street lights in the distance. The places they touched burned now whereas they had been warm until a few seconds ago, the silence heavy and pressing around them.

Here was another feeling Hannibal was not used to, and it was shameful, painful regret.

This was the crux of the matter, the trigger and the content of Will's nightmare, the fear that woke him in the middle of the night and made him leave Hannibal's side. The reminder of Baltimore and Chilton and Jack was enough to dig up memories of his time as a prisoner in an asylum. Placed there by Hannibal's tender loving schemes.

"Don't," Will said, although he did not make a move to touch Hannibal. "I know what you are thinking. Stop." Hannibal stayed silent. "I shouldn't have said that. I didn't mean that. I'm sorry," Will added, and he sounded it too.

“You have every right to speak your mind, Will,” Hannibal said. The longer he looked, the more out-of-focus the street lights became. "I knew how much you feared institutionalization, and yet I did the things I did, anyway."

Will didn't respond. This was a fact, too. Something that could not be falsified, no matter how much they both wished they could.

"Psychological profiles can mislead. Hard evidence, on the other hand, cannot. Frederick was found in what you call a 'murder suit,' with a half a body on an operating table in his basement and the rest in his oven. He had tokens from previous victims in a display cabinet down there, their meat in his freezers, his fingerprints all over the packages. Miriam Lass, the only surviving victim of the Ripper herself, identified and shot him in the face." Even though Will knew all these, Hannibal once again recounted them matter-of-factly, somewhat detaching himself from the severity of the situation. "Jack cannot refute any of these. And even if he believed Frederick, he would not dare follow that trail because as far as the FBI is concerned, the case is closed. Even Miss Lounds is sold on his guilt."

“It is highly unlikely that they’d believe Chilton, and even less likely that they’d suspect you,” Will said, more to himself than to Hannibal. “I just want everyone to leave us alone. Abigail is happy here, and so are we. God, Hannibal, I’ve never been this happy,” he said.

When he leaned against Hannibal’s side, putting his head on his shoulder, it felt as though the invisible barriers Hannibal felt materialize between them never existed. He knew he was forgiven. He knew that the two of them started over with a clean slate. And yet, he also knew he was powerless before this man, helpless in his love for his brave and cunning and strong mate.

“I once told you,” he said, not bothering with the blanket and uncaring for the cold as he reached and wrapped Will in a tight, intimate embrace, “that if I had to lay waste to the world to have you by my side, I would. Do you remember?” Will nodded against his shoulder, and Hannibal rubbed his cheek on his hair. “Don’t forget that, *mylimasis*. If anyone dares so much as to give us a side-eye, remember that you have me, you have Abigail, and that you have yourself. But most importantly, remember that together, it would take divine intervention to bring us down.”

In the intense silence that followed, Hannibal reached for Will’s hand that awkwardly held the lit cigarette away from their bodies, and led it to his own mouth. The action teased a small chuckle from Will.

“You are right,” Will said, sounding much more confident now. He took his own drag, and released it. “For all those things we did here, all our hunts and displays, and all those killers I let into my head before that, I cannot imagine a line I would not cross to protect this.”

“I was right from the start,” Hannibal allowed a smile onto his face now. “What did I call you when we first met?”

“You likened me to a rodent,” Will said coldly.

“Ah, but a rodent so vicious and so fiercely protective that it drinks down the venom straight from the snake’s body, leaves its carcass as a warning to others, and lives to tell the tale,” Hannibal explained.

“Hmm,” Will said, extracting himself from Hannibal’s embrace to throw the now extinguished stub into the ashtray. He picked up his phone and turned off the light, leaving them in the dark. “It would be a shame to survive that and freeze to death, don’t you think?”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Hannibal replied, and followed Will inside, the blankets forgotten on the bench. “The mongoose is such a smart animal.”

“Hannibal-”

“The mongoose should also reply to Frederick’s lawyer and state his disinterest in speaking to a convicted serial killer who once framed him for his murders and acted as his jailor.”

“I already did,” Will pushed him aside and went directly into their room. “I’m also not above biting your dick off if you ever call me that again.”

“And the rodent-that-shall-not-be-named shall never be named ever again,” Hannibal replied without missing a beat. They got into the bed, both on their backs and on their respective sides.

“Doctor Lecter?”

“Yes, Mr. Graham?” Hannibal smiled up at the ceiling, glad for the prompt to have their banter back.

“I’m cold.”

Hannibal purposefully remained on his side. "How cold?"

"I think it might be hypothermia," Will said, making his teeth rattle for added effect.

"In that case, my professional advice would be to take off your clothes," Hannibal said, still not moving.

"Oh," Will paused. "But how's that gonna help?"

"It will make sharing body heat easier," Hannibal said, sitting up to take off his top.

"Oh, good," Will sighed in mock relief, wriggling under the covers to take off his pyjamas. "For a moment there, I thought you were propositioning me, Doctor."

"It would be highly unethical of me," Hannibal said as he threw his own pyjama bottom to the side. "I have, after all, sworn to 'abstain from all intentional wrong-doing and harm, especially from abusing the bodies of man or woman.'"

"That’s so interesting,” Will said as Hannibal covered his naked body with his. “May I ask something?”

“Of course. I will answer to the best of my ability.”

“Great. Why are you rubbing your groin against mine, Doctor?” Will said, unable to hold his huff of amusement.

“But of course I am,” Hannibal replied earnestly. He was supporting his weight on his elbows as he ground down, his lips trailing along Will’s neck as he explained. “Exposure to cold is known to have the most devastating effects on the genitals. This is most noticeable by the drastic reduction in size, indicating acute susceptibility. Any doctor worth his salt would take precautions to prevent permanent damage immediately.”

“You are so full of shit,” Will said, laughing freely now. Hannibal rewarded it with a bite to his neck.

“I am saving your life.”

“Well then,” Will moved his legs further apart to allow Hannibal closer, and reached for the lube on the nightstand to push it into Hannibal’s hand. “Save it *deeper*, will you?”

“Are you suggesting an invasive procedure?” Hannibal asked, popping the cap open with a nail and pouring a liberal amount into his hand. “A bit unorthodox, don’t you think?”

“I don’t care,” Will said, eyes on Hannibal as he threw the bottle to the side. When Hannibal reached down between them, Will eagerly grabbed and pulled his thighs up to give him easier access. He also wriggled his ass a bit when Hannibal’s fingers touched his hole.

“How can I refuse when you make such a compelling argument?” Hannibal murmured, but his focus was entirely elsewhere, roleplay forgotten as he traced Will’s rim lightly. He felt Will’s hands on his back, touching all he can reach and grazing his nails when he deemed that Hannibal was taking too long.

“Come on,” Will swallowed loudly, his voice thick as he said, “Don’t tease me, love. I need you.”

Hannibal kissed him then, thrusting his tongue into Will’s mouth at the same time his finger breached the rim and buried itself knuckle deep into Will’s heat. Will moaned into his mouth and tilted his hips higher in a bid to take more. Hannibal relished the passion with which Will always accepted him into his body, and after a few thrusts, added a second finger, making sure to push as much lube as he could inside.

The feeling of a wet hand on his cock made draw back and lean on one elbow to gaze down at Will. Had anyone else been capable of distracting him to the point that he failed to notice them get the lube and reach for his penis, it would have been worrying. With Will, he was thankful for what little perceptiveness he could muster up when they were like this. He scissored his fingers to get Will loose and ready for him, and groaned at a particularly firm stroke that made his hips jerk forward.

“Hannibal,” Will breathed, stroking Hannibal with one hand while with the other, he reached down to add his own finger next to Hannibal’s, stretching himself taut and groaning at the

sensation of both of them inside himself. Hannibal set their pace, guiding them in and out, and he had to close his eyes in an attempt to make sure this did not end too soon. His cock held in Will's strong, warm and wet grip, their hands opening Will up for him, and the breathy moans into his ear were making this even more intense than their usual coupling. Will wanted reassurance of their safety and wellbeing in the most basic way possible, and Hannibal was going to deliver if it was the last thing he did.

He was gentle when he withdrew their fingers, and he allowed himself to enjoy Will's hand on him for a few more strokes before moving. Grabbing Will's thighs and bringing them together, Hannibal arranged him so that his legs were closed and tilted to the side in the air, pressing him down. The position displayed Will beautifully and allowed Hannibal the best angle for penetration.

"Yes, love," Will panted his approval when Hannibal rubbed the head of his cock against the rim, his breaths shallow due to the pressure on his diaphragm. "Now, come on."

Keeping one hand on the backs of Will's knees to hold him in place, Hannibal took a steadying breath, and obeyed.

It never ceased to amaze Hannibal how readily Will enveloped him, how tight and hot he was when he welcomed Hannibal, and how intimate it felt still. In reverence, Hannibal stroked Will's thigh as he pushed closer and took in the gasps, the twitches and the trembles with his eyes closed.

"Will," he breathed out. "Will, Will, Will…" He gave them both a few seconds to get used to the feeling of being as deeply connected as possible, before he moved again.

"I will do anything for you," Hannibal murmured as he began to thrust into Will slowly but firmly, each one drawing silent gasps from him. "Anything you want." He leaned down to press a kiss on the nearest calf. "Anything you need." He bit his lips, careful to keep Will exactly as he was with one hand, while reaching down to where they were connected. He tore his eyes from Will's flushed face, head thrown back and hair a mess on the pillow, to look down. "Anything to keep you with me," he whispered, tracing his thumb around the tight circle, touching both himself and Will at the same time.

It was that touch that broke Will's voice on a moan, and Hannibal's patience along with it. With a sharp jerk of his hips, Hannibal gave up on the slow and steady and began, instead, to thrust into Will with abandon. This was met with enthusiasm. Will, heedless of Hannibal's grip on his knees, spread his legs apart and wrapped them around Hannibal's torso, using them to jerk him forward. Unbalanced, Hannibal fell forward and was caught in Will's arms, chests pressed together tightly, Will's cock trapped between them, the friction making him cry out softly, his nails digging into Hannibal's back.

The change in position also helped Hannibal hit Will's prostate unerringly. His subdued cries and Hannibal's heavy panting mixed with the sound of their bodies meeting, and was more beautiful than any performance, any composition, any melody Hannibal ever heard in his days on earth.

“You have me, Will. You own me. You are *everything*,” he said. His mouth was open on the side of Will’s chin, rubbing his lips against the stubble there and enjoying the feeling. “Tell me you are mine, *mylimasis*. Let me hear you.”

“I’m yours,” Will replied breathily, sounding overwhelmed by the sensations he was feeling. “Yours, love, I’m yours, yours, always,” he continued, taking one hand up to slide his fingers into Hannibal’s hair and cupping his head. The tenderness in the action was in direct contrast to the brutal rhythm Hannibal was pursuing now. Everything was hot and slick, and the pleasure was escalating. Hannibal reached down to touch Will, but was stopped by clipped words. “No. Like this.” So Hannibal snaked his free hand under Will’s shoulder and used it to increase the speed, the strength and the accuracy of his thrusts.

When Will came, no sound made it out of his open mouth. He was entirely silent as his cock jerked between their abdomens, the warmth of it spreading with their movements. His body pulsated around Hannibal, who straightened and greedily held onto his waist, thrusting helplessly as the contractions pulled his orgasm from him. He let out a long moan that travelled from his guts to his mouth, and came into Will with shallow, irregular jerks, convulsing inside him.

Hannibal collapsed on top of Will and instead of protest, he received approval in the form of a warm kiss from lips lax with pleasure. Out of all the ways Hannibal knew Will now, these kisses were his favourite, when he knew he had rendered Will useless, unable to act and express himself as successfully as he wanted to. He gladly sank into the kiss, still connected to Will, and savoured the taste of elation from his mouth.

Once they caught their breaths, Will allowed his legs to fall from around Hannibal’s hips and onto the bed, sighing when it caused Hannibal to slip from him. To compensate, Hannibal grabbed him before turning them so he was the one on his back, laying Will along him and cradling his body close. Will managed to grab a corner of the slipped covers without breaking from the hold, and pulled it over them. Neither cared for the mess or the sweat as their eyelids became heavier.

Hannibal squeezed Will’s shoulder before he fell asleep, though.

“Will?”

“Yes, love?” Will mumbled into Hannibal’s chest.

“I want us to have a new rule.” That got Will’s attention.

“What is it?”

“From now on, I want you to wake me up when you have a nightmare,” Hannibal said. He wanted to be with Will, to offer him comfort and protection whenever he needed it, but for the sake of keeping the pillow talk light, he added, “Just in case you needed immediate medical attention, you see.”

“I see,” Will whispered, more solemnly than the quip warranted. He pressed a kiss over Hannibal’s heart, and repeated, softer, “I see.”

Within Will's anchoring embrace, Hannibal let himself close his eyes and drift off to sleep, feeling secure in the knowledge that words were not always necessary for them to understand each other completely and without question.

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